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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Lou Henry Hoover house is located at 623 Mirada Road at the southwest corner of Leland Stanford, Jr. University in Palo Alto, California. The house, set into the slope of San Juan Hill, is surrounded by native oak and imported exotic trees; the hillside location was an important feature in selecting the house site inasmuch as it affords a spectacular view of San Francisco Bay and overlooks the Stanford campus. The original size of the house lot was approximately 1.05 acres; the property was leased, as are all faculty house lots on the campus, from the University. In later years an adjoining lot was opened when a house on nearby Cabrillo Avenue was demolished. Since the Hoover house had by that time passed into University ownership, the adjoining lot was left open to form a spacious rear yard which did not exist during the residence of the Hoovers. In this area, immediately behind the house is a modern red brick pavilion which accentuates the garden, which remains much as it was during the Hoovers' residence. Additional space in the rear yard had been created earlier during Hoover's presidency when the Secret Service ordered the closure of a portion of Santa Ynez Street, which ran up to the summit of San Juan Hill and passed the house. There is no front yard, just a border strip of lawn and shrubs facing Mirada Road.

There are no auxiliary structures on the lot; a garage and pool are attached to the main house structure. The house is an irregularly shaped, three-story structure. The maximum dimensions of the house are 192' by 65'. Set into the hillside, the house stands two stories high in the front (facing Mirada Road) and three stories high in the rear (facing Cabrillo Avenue). The design, as determined by Lou Henry Hoover in conjunction with supervising architects Arthur and Birge Clark, was made to resemble "blocks piled up." Built in an early International style, the house was in the opinion of the architects modeled after Algerian (North Africa) homes Mrs. Hoover had seen. The result was a large, rambling structure which reflected Mrs. Hoover's tastes and character; "the prevailing spirit of the house is one of extreme liveableness and utter lack of formality and ostentation, the individuality of the owner being evidenced everywhere by the lack of conventionality and disregard of tradition or the accepted way of doing things" [1]. President Hoover's design contribution was an order to make the house fire-proof.

The house was built on a reinforced concrete slab foundation; the walls are reinforced concrete columns with hollow tile curtain walls and reinforced concrete beams which support reinforced concrete slab roofs. The exterior finish is stucco, painted white; exterior wooden trim is painted a dark-gray. There is no exterior ornamentation with the exception of molded drain pipes on some facades, plain exterior staircases with red brick treads and risers, two wooden pergolas set atop reinforced concrete

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SPECIFIC DATES 1919-1920

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Lou Henry Hoover, Arthur B. Clark, Birge M. Clark

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Lou Henry Hoover house, built between 1919 and 1920, was designed by the wife of Herbert Clark Hoover, 31st President of the United States of America, as the Hoover family residence. The Hoovers met while students studying at Stanford and retained a life-long affinity for the campus, maintaining various residences there for almost fifty years. The Lou Henry Hoover house was their first and only permanent residence and incorporates design features strongly indicative of both Mrs. Hoover and the President's character and personalities. in its design as an early example of the International style with anachronistic leaded glass windows and its "tudoresque" interior features, and as a structure designed by Mrs. Hoover, the house is of National significance in the area of Architecture. Though sporadically occupied by the Hoovers prior to 1933, the house was maintained as their permanent residence; it was here in 1928 that Hoover awaited the election results of his successful bid for the Presidency and where he waited for the results of his unsuccessful re-election bid in 1932. From 1933 to 1944 the house served as the retirement home of the Hoovers. In 1944, following the death of Mrs. Hoover, the President deeded the house to Stanford University for use as the home of the University president, a function which has been maintained to the present day. Other Hoover ties to the Stanford campus include temporary residences, homes built for faculty members by Mrs. Hoover, the Herbert Clark Hoover Memorial Building (authorized by Congress), and the Lou Henry Hoover Building, both of which are adjacent to the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace established by the President. There is a strong Hoover connection with Stanford University. As the only permanent residence of President Herbert Clark Hoover, as a site strongly associated with his personal and political life (as evidenced by his presence in the house during the 1928 and 1932 elections) on a campus strongly associated with both he and his wife, the house also of National significance in the Politics/Government. The Lou Henry Hoover house was nominated to and the National Register of Historic Places in late 1977; it was placed on the National Register on January 30, 1978, at a National level of significance. The house is also California State Registered Landmark Number 913, being so designated on May 18, This nomination is submitted for consideration of the house as a National Historic Landmark.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See Continuation Sheet

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columns and a small balcony on the second floor level on the front (Mirada Road) facade of the house. The flat roofs are finished with red sand-pressed brick with some interspersed bluegreen glazed tiles and have low parapets. The roofs were designed for use as terraces and reflect the Hoovers' love of outdoor living with all rooms opening on to terraces and with a large exterior fireplace on the main (second floor level) terrace.

All windows are rectangular, flat casements with plain trim and slipsills. Windows in the principal rooms have leaded glass panes with a diamond pattern; others are wooden sashes with eight panes each. A large window on the main (Mirada Road) facade is in the Palladian motif. There is also a bay window on the second floor level on the rear facade which forms a small breakfast alcove in the dining room. President Hoover specified that the windows in his study be picture windows; they are the only plate glass windows in the house and are highlighted by Indiana limestone trim and sills. All doors leading on to the terraces are French doors, with the doors leading from principal rooms being leaded glass. The main, front door wood and leaded glass with sidelights; it fits into a recessed entrance-way and has an arched opening. A small viewing port set into the entrance-way wall to the right of the door permitted the butler to view anyone approaching the front door.

There are fireplaces in each principal room, all of which lead into three flues which exit at various roof levels at square, closed chimneys with side openings. The interior walls are mainly hollow tile, there are also some wood-stud partitions; all interior walls are rough textured plaster which was originally painted "and glazed in very neutral tans and browns." The walls are now painted off-white. The floors are principally oak laid over 1"x2" stringers set on the concrete slab foundation; the floors in the bathrooms are tiled and floors in service areas and the servants' quarters on the first floor level are finished concrete with gutters which has now been carpeted. Originally plans called for the placement of brown, glazed tile in strategic hallways and corridors to hamper the spread of fire; only one floor was laid, in 1928, due to a shortage of desirable tile. The corridor on the first floor level had a "temporarily" installed douglas fir floor which was to ultimately be replaced with tile. It never was, and the floor was replaced in 1981 when leaking water pipes rotted and buckled the floor boards. The new floor was oak installed to match the other floors in the house. The floor level rises from the dining room into a small library alcove and into the dining room; this was a deliberate design

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feature to allow for the staging of amateur theatrical productions.

The ceilings in the entrance hall, living room, study, dining hall, stairway hall, and Belgian alcove are suspended from wires set into the slabs above and are coved, shaped on wire lath and plastered. These ceilings were all originally painted in an "autumnal gold" color; all retain this color scheme with the exception of the living room ceiling, which is now off-white, and the dining room ceiling, which was "restored" to a brighter shade of gold in the 1970s. The coved ceilings were built to allow for the installation of indirect lighting. 300 25-watt bulbs were set in the carved oak cornice of the living room while lesser numbers were installed elsewhere. At the same time Mrs. Hoover wanted beamed ceilings, and so the architects, noting that the ceiling did not need to be structurally sound due to the concrete slab roof, but knowing that "we couldn't just run them into the wall, so we hit on this way of curving them down to the back edge of the cornice" [2]. In other areas standard light fixtures were hung; some for economy were plain white milk-glass. Only a few original fixtures remain; the house now has appropriate period antiques which replace intrusive modern fixtures added in later years.

The principal rooms are either paneled to the ceiling cornice or have paneled wainscots of oak; the study also has redwood The panels, bracketed cornice, and beamed ceilings have been described as "tudoresque" and are a marked contrast, along with the leaded glass windows, with the plain, unadorned, Some panels are "secret" spring-activated modern exterior. doorways leading into storage spaces. Panels in the dining room open into shelves which stored Mrs. Hoover's pewter and china. panel in the living room opens into a small "wine-cellar"; while three small panels above the fireplace mantel open into small nooks in which President Hoover stored his tobacco and pipes. Other "secret" doorways are a mirrored "closet door" in Mrs. Hoover's dressing room which actually opens on to a hidden staircase leading to a private study on the third floor level and a bookcase in Herbert Hoover, Jr.'s bedroom which swings open when a book is moved and a cord pulled to reveal a small room.

There are nine fireplaces in the house; most are Indiana limestone. The fireplace in the entrance hall and the fireplace in the living room are built into corners so that visitors entering the front door would be greeted by a blazing fire and so that the walls of the living room would be open to allow for the placement of French doors leading out on to the terrace and

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folding doors which lead into the Belgian alcove. The limestone fireplaces were originally unpainted stone; the living room fireplace was painted off-white in the 1970s. This fireplace was designed to "reproduce" a fireplace in the "Red House" outside of London where the Hoovers had lived prior to and during the First World War. In later years when the Red House was demolished Mrs. Hoover purchased the fireplace, had it shipped to California, where she hoped to install it in the house, and then found that her memory had not accurately recalled the fireplace. It was never installed [3]. The fireplace in Herbert Hoover, Jr.'s bedroom is clinker brick; a special feature are two flanking wooden seats on which President Hoover would sit, facing his son, to read before the fire.

The major stairway in the house leads from the first to the third level, with a break on the second floor level in the stairway hall. Magnesite treads and risers were used on the spiral stairway from the first to second floor levels. The treads are now carpeted. The spiral stairway leading up from the second to third floor levels is oak; both sections of the stairway have carved oak banisters with spindles separated by Gothic cusps. The oak newels were hand-carved. Other, plain stairways include the secret staircase from Mrs. Hoover's dressing room up to her hidden study and a staircase which leads from the servants' quarters on the first floor level in the south wing of the house to the kitchen on the second floor level.

Although President Hoover once referred to the house as having seven rooms (he meant major rooms) there are actually fifty-seven rooms, including large closets, bathrooms, and hallways. A schematic plan of all three floor levels of the house has been appended to this nomination. Part of the house complex and actually attached to the structure is a one-car garage with a two-car garage addition built in 1925 and an enclosed pool. The pool, surrounded by a high, solid stucco wall, originally included a pergola which is now gone. The pool area has been extensively remodeled with a new surface, concrete coping, and paving.

The house is in excellent condition with the exception of leaks in the roof which have been halted at this time and is carefully maintained by a tenant with a strong affinity for the house's design and history. Period antiques, including at least one surviving piece of Hoover furniture, are used in the house. Many antiques are associated with the history of Stanford University and were placed in the house to establish a tradition along with furnishings from the families of the various University

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presidents, including those who lived in the house following the death of Mrs. Hoover and the President's deeding the house to the University. There are but a few minor alterations; those not already discussed within the body of the descriptive narrative include a new floor and the removal of a partition wall from the kitchen to create a "banquet kitchen" for catered events, two modern skylights added in the kitchen and servants' dining room, and the sealing of a door and the opening of a new doorway in the dining room. The house possesses an extraordinary degree of integrity; all repairs are done with in-kind historic materials and methods.

FOOTNOTES

- 1. Letter, Birge M. Clark to Harold D. Carewe, September 12, 1928. Manuscript, Stanford University Archives, SC/#76b.
- Remarks made by Birge M. Clark on the occasion of the designation of the Lou Henry Hoover house as a California State Landmark. Stanford Historical Society Newsletter, Volume 2, Number 4, Spring/Summer 1978. Page 5.
- 3. Birge M. Clark "Memo on Planning and Construction of the Hoover Home on the Stanford Campus." February 10, 1965. Manuscript, Stanford University Archives, SC/#76b. Page 7.

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The above statement of significance is based on the more detailed history which follows.

HISTORY

The Lou Henry Hoover house was built between 1919 and 1920 as the permanent family residence of Herbert Clark and Lou Henry Hoover. Born in West Branch, Iowa in 1874, Hoover, son of a Quaker blacksmith and a school teacher, was a member of the first class of Leland Stanford, Jr. University. Opened in 1891 by former California Governor Leland Stanford and his wife in memory of their son, the University was located in Palo Alto, California, thirty miles south of San Francisco. Studying geology, Hoover met fellow student Lou Henry in a geology lab. Lou Henry had also been born in Iowa in 1874 but had moved to Monterey, California, with her family in 1884. She entered Stanford University in 1894 and met the soon-to-graduate Hoover. after graduation, worked for a while in the California gold mines and then in Western Australia, returning in 1899 to marry the recently graduated Lou Henry. For the rest of their lives the Hoovers would retain a strong affinity for their alma mater, maintaining residences on the campus despite travels and residence abroad in China, Ceylon, Burma, Siberia, Australia, Egypt, Japan, England, most of Europe, and finally Washington, D.C. Following Hoover's highly publicized and praised role in relief efforts for some 33 million displaced and starving civilian victims of the First World War in Europe and his appointment by President Woodrow Wilson as Director General of Post War Relief and Rehabilitation in 1919, Lou Henry Hoover began to implement plans generated by the Hoovers during the war for a permanent residence on the Stanford campus.

Stanford University, while retaining ownership of all campus lands, leases small lots to faculty and staff members for extended periods (usually 99 years) who then build houses on the property. When the lease expires it can be extended or the house becomes University property. Since Hoover was a University Trustee Lou Henry Hoover signed a lease for an undeveloped lot atop San Juan Hill, overlooking the campus, in 1919. Reached by two roads, Santa Ynez Drive, which reached the summit of the hill, where a small reservoir was located, and Mirada Road, the site for the house was surveyed and work began the same year.

Prior to the end of the war the Hoovers had commissioned architect Louis Mulgardt to design their Stanford home; however Mulgardt publicized his appointment prior to the end of the war, angering the Hoovers, who felt that it was in an inopportune time

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in the waning months of a terrible conflict to announce the construction of a large home. The design suggested also did not meet with Mrs. Hoover's approval, and so Mulgardt was dismissed and after several consultations the Hoovers convinced Stanford Professor of Art Arthur B. Clark, who practiced freelance architecture in the summer to be their architect. Clark agreed on the condition that Mrs. Hoover design the house and that Clark, aided by architectural draftsman Charles Davis and Clark's architect son, Birge would serve in an advisory capacity.

Mrs. Hoover agreed, stating that the house "would just go along, developing a plan to fit the site and their needs" [1].Conceived as a small house no larger than nearby faculty residences, the needs of the Hoovers for a large structure to entertain guests (Hoover was an internationally renowned figure) the house began to grow on paper to a large, sprawling structure. Scaffolds were erected on the site with chairs so that Mrs. Hoover could sit at the approximate level and area of projected rooms and terraces to assess the view; she freely sketched ideas for the house and asked the architects for advice though "precedent or convention had no weight whatsoever....If a unique or unprecedented idea clicked with her, she would unhesitatingly accept it. there are certain mixtures of architectural styles in the interior (heresy in that day), but any hint that something was "not done" would simply result [her] saying, "Well, it's time someone did"[2]. The problem of size (Mrs. Hoover not wanting the house to appear too large or ostentatious) was solved by the hillside site with the house disappearing into the slope and hence appearing much smaller.

Work on the house continued through 1920, though certain areas were left unfinished. These included a small hallway just off the main entrance known as the "Belgian alcove," which was designed to hold artworks and gifts presented to Hoover as a result of his Belgian relief efforts. A decision on cases could not be reached and the room was never completed. Certain floors were to be tiled to aid in the fire-proofing of the house but were not immediately tiled yet "this leaving of things unfinished caused no distress at all to Mrs. Hoover—in fact she felt from her life in England that houses were forever being changed, added to, altered and worked over in certain ways" [3]. Hollow tile was accordingly selected for the walls, being easy to knock out for remodeling.

The house was occupied by the Hoovers in June of 1920; it was occupied for but a short time before Hoover was appointed Secretary of Commerce by President Warren G. Harding (following

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Harding's death he continued to serve as Secretary of Commerce for President Calvin Coolidge) in 1921. Mrs. Hoover continued to supervise work on the house, which was occupied by caretakers for much of the year, the Hoovers only making occasional visits. Hoovers were at home in 1928, though, when Hoover was seeking election as the Republican candidate for President. The evening of November 8, 1928, was marked by great excitement in the house; dozens of friends and supporters had gathered to await the outcome of the election. A large unfinished room on the first floor level had been hastily remodeled into a press room; a telegraph had been installed and everyone listened to the election returns on the radio. With Hoover's victory over his Democratic rival, Alfred E. Smith, a crowd of thousands of students and faculty gathered outside the home; they were joined by John Phillip Sousa's band, which was playing on campus that Hoover had won his first public elective office; he was also "the first Chief Executive born west of the Mississippi and the first elected from California"[4].

During his term as President, Hoover and his family paid only brief occasional visits to the home. The house was the object of great curiosity during the Presidential years as well as earlier; various architectural magazines and other journals frequently requested information and photographs. Mrs. Hoover felt that the house was a private matter and discouraged publicity. became important as Hoover's term continued into the 1930s as world-wide economic troubles helped plunge the United States into the Great Depression. Hoover was held personally responsible by many and faced mounting criticism; in a time of great hardship the family was necessarily cautious about publicity concerning their unique home. Though renominated by the Republicans in 1932 Hoover was ignominiously defeated by his Democratic rival, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Election night was again observed in the Stanford University house.

Following President Hoover's retirement from public office, both he and Mrs. Hoover returned to their home in California, remaining there but also maintaining a New York apartment as their second residence. It was at the New York apartment that Lou Henry Hoover died in 1944. Following her death President Hoover deeded the house to Stanford University for use as the home of University president. President Hoover continued to maintain strong ties to the University, however, retaining his seat on the Board of Trustees and an passionate interest in the Hoover Institution on War, Peace, and Revolution, which he had established on the campus. President Hoover died in New York City in 1964. The Lou Henry Hoover house has continuously been

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maintained as the home of the President of Stanford University since 1944; through the years little change has taken place. The house is in excellent condition.

FOOTNOTES

- 1. Oral History Interview with Birge M. Clark by Raymond Henle, January 19, 1970. Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Bank, Iowa. Page 4.
- Clark, "Memo on Planning and Construction of the Hoover Home," Page 2.
- 3. Ibid, Page 5.
- 4. Robert G. Ferris, ed. The Presidents: From the Inauguration of George Washington to the Inauguration of Gerald R. Ford; Historic Places Commemorating the Chief Executives of the United States. Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1976. Page 256.

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Files on the Construction of the Lou Henry Hoover House. SC/#76b, Stanford University Archives.

Regnery, Dorothy. "National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form" for the Lou Henry Hoover House, 1977.

"Residence for Mrs. Lou Henry Hoover; Floor Plans, Elevations" [1919]. Map M912 A-W, Stanford University Archives.

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Clark, Birge M. "Oral History Interview With...By Raymond Henle, January 19, 1970." Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa.

Clark, Birge M. [Remarks made on the occasion of the dedication of the Lou Henry Hoover house as a California State Registered Landmark, May 18, 1978] Stanford Historical Society Newsletter, Volume 2, Number 4, Spring/Summer 1978.

Ferris, Robert G., editor. The Presidents: From the Inauguration of George Washington to the Inauguration of Gerald R. Ford; Historic Places Commemorating the Chief Executives of the United States. (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1976.)

Regnery, Dorothy. An Enduring Heritage. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1976.)

Stanford Alumni Review, January 1946 (Volume 47), Page 9.

APPENDIX I:

SCHEMATIC FLOOR PLAN DRAWINGS

LOU HENRY HOOVER HOUSE

623 Mirada Road Leland Stanford, Jr. University Palo Alto, California







